DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 075 394 SP 006 359

AUTHOR Payne, James
TITLE Teacher Sensitivity to Curricular Forces.
PUB DATE [70]
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Change Agents; *Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Evaluation; *Educational Theories; Human Development; Learning; Research Projects; Social Factors; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Eighty-four students in the first session of a graduate course were asked to indicate the forces which affected the curriculum in their school. Over the beginning of three terms, the students divided themselves into small groups of five or six persons to list the suggestions offered in response to this question. A recorder in each group listed the suggestions and later reported the group's suggestions to the entire class. During the class report, suggestions were classified under the nature of learning, the nature of knowledge, human development, educational forces, and social forces. Ninety percent of the contributed suggestions related to the practical aspects of education as educational forces and social forces and only 10 percent related to the theoretical. Based on the research findings, the course was restructured to emphasize the nature of learning and human development. Response to the course was favorable. (A seven-item bibliography is included.) (MJM)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

192

ED 075394

Teacher Sensitivity to Curricular Forces

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Dr. James Payne

Associate Professor
of
Elementary Education

Shippensburg State College

Shippensburg, Pa.

SP 006 359

Teacher Sensitivity to Curricular Forces

Rationale

Recent writers such as Kozol (1967) and Silberman (1970) have described the school as a repressive institution. What forces influence the teacher's behavior within the classroom? The evidence which has accumulated in print and within the experience of a multitude of college teachers indicates that many teachers are not following the theory of the professors. However, quite often the college professors are not practicing what they teach. In the study of Amish and Non-Amish schools in Mifflin County (Payne, 1970), similar teaching patterns were found for the college-trained public school teacher and the Amish teacher with no formal training. While the Amish teacher's behavior was quite consistent with the Amish society, the public school teacher's behavior was not consistent with the philosophy of present day teacher education theory.

Lippitt (1965:11) in "Roles and Processes in Curriculum Development and Change," states that in education significant changes in practice require changes in attitudes, skills, and values of the practitioner in order for the change to be successful. The teacher attempts change in a public school under full view of a pluralistic public. Consequently, any deviation from the status quo is liable to create "waves" and thus increase the difficulty of the teacher's task. Hence, the teacher tends

to develop an attitudinal and value system consistent with survival within the local controlled public school. The teacher may become highly sensitive to local pressures and insensitive to pressures exerted by scholars in education and child development.

Procedure

The hypothesis that teachers are much more sensitive to local pressures than to educational theory was tested in the following manner.

At the first session of a graduate course, "Modern Trends in Elementary Curriculum," the following question was asked, "What forces do you feel affect the curriculum in your school?" Over the beginning of three terms a total of 84 students divided themselves into small groups of five or six persons to list the suggestions offered in response to this question. By thus grouping the students everyone was able to contribute his idea. A recorder in each group listed the suggestions and later reported his group's suggestions to the entire class. During this report to the class suggestions were classified by the class under these headings:

1. The Nature of Learning
2. The Nature of Knowledge
3. Human Development
4. Educational Forces
5. Social Forces

These classifications were not suggested until after the groups had listed their ideas. Generally there was unanimous agreement concerning to which classification a suggestion belonged. However, some suggestions led to discussion. Thus, a few suggestions were listed under more than one classification.

More than eighty percent of the 84 students involved were actively engaged in teaching at the time they took the course. All had taught to some extent. These teachers were pursuing a master's degree and/or permanent certification. The setting for this graduate class was a state college in a predominately rural area of Southcentral Pennsylvania. This area would be described as economically stable and ideologically conservative.

Findings

Table 1 indicates the results of this discussion and classification. The Nature of Learning received only one questionable nomination. Students felt that the experimental programs of nearby colleges could be classified under the Nature of Learning as well as under Educational Forces.

The Nature of Knowledge received two nominations. The knowledge explosion was accepted without debate. However, the more questionable standardized tests were classified under the Nature of Knowledge. Because of the profit motive of the publishers, standardized tests were also included under Social Forces.

Table 1

Number and Percentage of the Fifty-One Suggestions Classified Under Each Heading

Nature of Learning		Nature of Knowledge		Human Development		Educational Forces		Social Forces	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1	2	2	4	2	4	12	24	34	66

The local school administration was the most prominent Educational Force mentioned. Also prominent as Educational Forces were the teacher's age and educational background. Other suggestions under Educational Forces centered around the influence of higher education and educational levels of society.

Two-thirds of the suggestions were classified under Social Forces. Money was named by all three classes. Technological forces were proposed by two of the three classes. They saw it as changing the social makeup of society rather than as increasing knowledge. The geographic location and size of the school district were also mentioned by two classes. Other forces proposed centered around social problems (race, drugs, socio-economic, etc.), legal action (state mandates and court decisions), industry's economic involvement in education, public attitudes concerning education, and tradition and social mores.

Implications

Why were ninety percent of the suggestions contributed related to the practical aspects of education as educational forces and social forces and only ten percent related to the theoretical? One suggestion is that the teacher is so much a part of the local educational and social society that he cannot see beyond its immediate demands.

Festinger (1957) has developed a theory of cognitive dissonance which might help to explain this sensitivity to social

issues. The teacher finds dissonance between the theoretical elements of teaching and the expectations of the community and local school. Dissonance being psychologically uncomfortable motivates the person to try to reduce dissonance and achieve consonance. Thus, unless the local community and school administration offer some reward for teacher behavior influenced by the theoretical knowledge of learning, child development and the structure of knowledge, the teacher tunes out these theoretical pressures. In the language of Piaget, these pressures cannot be assimulated and to accomodate these theoretical ideas into the teacher's cognitive structure would increase dissonance. Hence, the teacher may become insensitive to them.

Krech, Crutchfield and Ballachey (1962:262) note that one way to reduce the uncomfortable state resulting from discrepancy in attitudes is to shift the inner attitude so that it corresponds more closely to the outward expression. Teachers seemingly become quite sensitive to local attitudes concerning education. The theoretical information regarding the nature of learning, knowledge and human development sounds too unreal and idealistic to be practical. In support of this statement it was suggested in at least two of these three classes that what is being taught about education at the college level is idealistic and impractical. It would appear that one of the greatest needs in all college courses is to incorporate what is known about the nature of learning, the nature of knowledge and human development into the instructional methods of the college class. Silberman (1970:408)

in the book Crisis in the Classroom, notes the need in all disciplines for "emphasis on the means of communication and the conduct and strategy of intellectual inquiry" rather than the collection of information. In discussing the education of the teacher, Silberman writes that the gathering of knowledge in philosophy, literature, history and the humanities is not enough. "Courses must be taught in such a way as to give students a deeper understanding of themselves as educators (Silberman, 1970:504)." Silberman says that only as the student engages with his instructors in the kind of discovery that is expected in the student's teaching will he in turn employ this discovery in his teaching.

Application

In an attempt to change teaching practices and attitudes and to increase sensitivity to human development and the nature of learning the course, "Modern Trends in Elementary Curriculum," was restructured. Rogers' Freedom to Learn (1969) was used as a guide for this restructuring. At the beginning of the course each graduate student was asked to develop his own goals for the course and a plan for achieving these goals. No person need completely achieve the goals he selected at the beginning of the course. Many students achieved the goals first selected, but other students, after considerable reading, changed theirs. Flexibility was the key to the course. Each student also selected a topic of interest to him upon which to report to the class. Discussion followed each report. Three or four three-page essays

based upon the person's readings were turned in to the instructor. Class sessions involved a combination of instructor and student input and discussion. Small group as well as class discussion and activity were used. Individual involvement and application to the graduate student's own classroom were sought. An eleven-page course description and some suggested readings and activities provided a supportive structure within which personal freedom could be experienced. Most graduate students, having been conditioned to programming by instructors, at first found this a frustrating experience. However, as the course progressed this frustration melted away.

At the end of the course each student stated the goals he felt he achieved during the course. He listed activities, such as reading, interviewing, visitation, etc., engaged in to fulfill these goals. He also evaluated himself and defended a final grade for himself. A final grade for the college was derived from the student's defense of the grade he felt he had earned, peer evaluation of his class report, and the instructor's evaluation on the basis of his essays and other input. The following Likert type scale was used to evaluate the results of the course. Over eighty percent of the 83 students taking the course during the three terms involved in the study were teachers. The one-fourth of the 83 students who had completed the most graduate courses were selected for a comparison of this course to other graduate courses completed. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Percentage of one-fourth of Students who had Completed Most Graduate Courses Selecting Category

Item	Categories				
In comparison with other graduate courses,	Much More	More	Same	Less	Much Less
1. In this course I have worked	26%	61%	13%	0%	0%
2. From this course I have learned	32%	55%	13%	0%	0%
3. From this course I have changed in my classroom behavior and method of instruction	15%	75%	10%	0%	0%
4. As a result of this course I have changed my attitudes about education	26%	59%	17%	0%	0%
5. I have liked this course	27%	59%	14%	0%	0%

It must be recognized that response on a Likert type scale does not indicate actual practice. However, it does give some indication of the direction actual practice might take. A limited degree of later feedback from teachers indicated that classroom practices were changing. One teacher with fifteen years teaching experience wrote that she tried new ideas in her classroom, made a presentation about what she was doing to the faculty, and experienced her most rewarding year of teaching.

In summary, it would appear that:

1. College students need enough challenge and freedom to cause them a limited degree of frustration.

2. Too much freedom in a college class can raise the anxiety level of college students to the point of diminishing returns.

3. A structure must be provided by the college instructor. The kind and degree of structure will depend upon the prior conditioning of the college students. But this structure must lead to increased student involvement in the search for knowledge.

4. Change on the part of teachers appears to result from active involvement in the search for knowledge rather than a passive receiving of information.

5. Change in the classroom must be gradual enough for "equalibration" to result.

6. When what is known about the nature of learning is incorporated into the instructional methods of the college class, college students' sensitivity to the subject increases.

References

Festinger, L. A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson, 1957.

Kozol, Jonathan. Death at an Early Age. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

Krech, David, Richard S. Crutchfield and Egerton L. Ballachey. Individual in Society. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1962.

Lippitt, Ronald. "Roles and Processes in Curriculum Development and Change" in Strategy for Curriculum Change. Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1965.

Payne, James Irvin. "Analysis of Teacher-Student Classroom Interaction in Amish and Non-Amish Schools using Flanders Interaction Analysis Technique." (D. Ed. Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1970.)

Rogers, Carl R. Freedom to Learn. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1969.

Silberman, Charles E. Crisis in the Classroom. New York: Random House, 1970.

192

AUG 3 1972

9 South Prince Street
Shippensburg, Pa. 17257

August 30, 1972

Office of the Editor
The Journal of Teacher Education
1201 Sixteenth Street
Washington, D. C. 20036

Dear Sirs:

Inclosed is a manuscript submitted for publication in The Journal of Teacher Education.

Respectfully Submitted,

James Payne

James Payne
Associate Professor
of Education
Shippensburg State College

5.